

# FENCES, GARDEN WALLS & GATES

## INTRODUCTION

All fences, garden walls and gates that are visible from the public way require the approval of a certificate of appropriateness by the Boards of Architectural Review.

An important visual feature of the historic districts are the fences, garden walls and gates that define property lines. Fences serve as a distinctive feature of the streetscape and individual yards. Fences and garden walls also provide a sense of privacy and enclosure for property owners.

Fences are often partially transparent and, in the historic districts, are made of a number of materials including wood, masonry and brick. Garden walls are constructed of masonry and provide a visual barrier. Gates are made of a number of different materials including wood and metal.

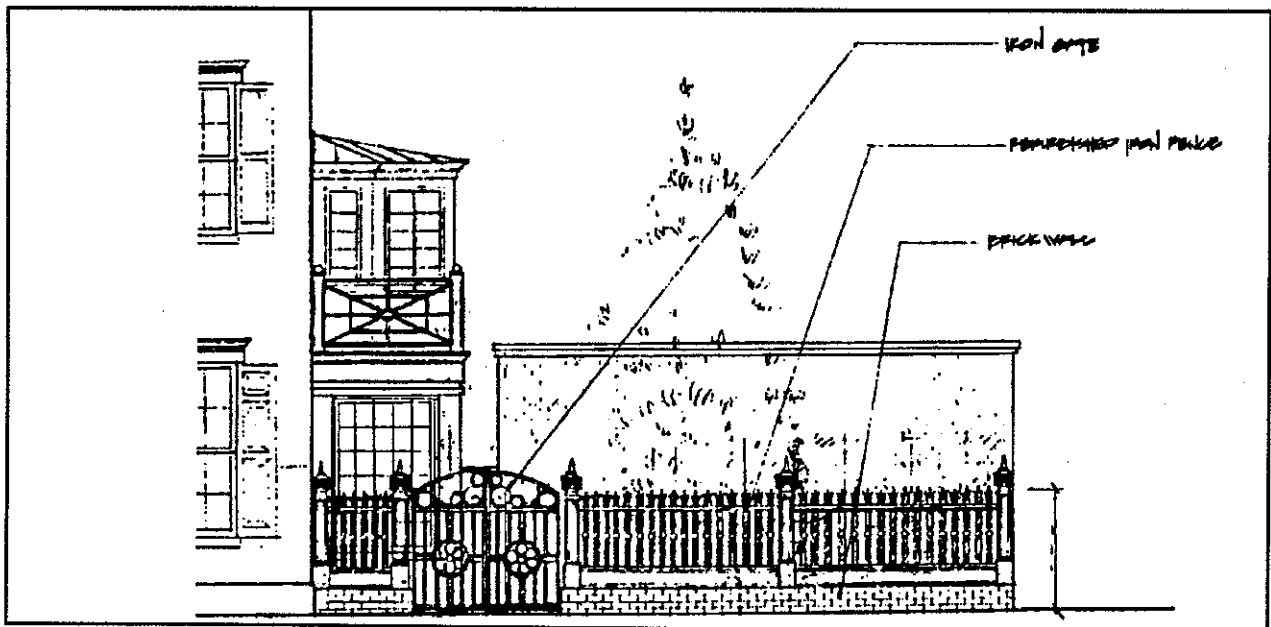
## REQUIREMENTS

### • Vision clearance

There is a general City requirement that buildings and structures such as fences on corner lots must maintain a vision clearance at the corner for purposes of transportation safety. In such instances, structures may be no higher than 42" (3' 6") above the curb. There is also a general policy to maintain the average front building line in the historic districts. Therefore, the Zoning Ordinance gives the Boards of Architectural Review the power to waive this requirement as well as other yard requirements where the maintenance of the building line is important to the character of the blockface.

• Fences in required front yards must be open and cannot exceed 3' 6" in height. Also, in general, fences on corner lots cannot exceed 3' 6" in any yard. (See § 7-202 (A)(1) of the Zoning Ordinance).

• Fences in required rear and side yards may be open or closed, but cannot exceed 6' in height. (See § 7-202(B)(3) of the Zoning Ordinance) This ensures that there will be adequate light and ventilation. • Construction of fences, garden walls and gates must



*Proposal for brick and iron fence.*

SOURCE: 304 S. St. Asaph Street, BAR Case #92-88, Studio 39 Landscape Architecture

meet the requirements of the Virginia Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC).

- All brick fences and garden walls require the issuance of a building permit.
- Retaining walls over 4' in height must be designed by an engineer licensed in the Commonwealth of Virginia.
- Footings for masonry fences and walls cannot encroach on adjacent property.

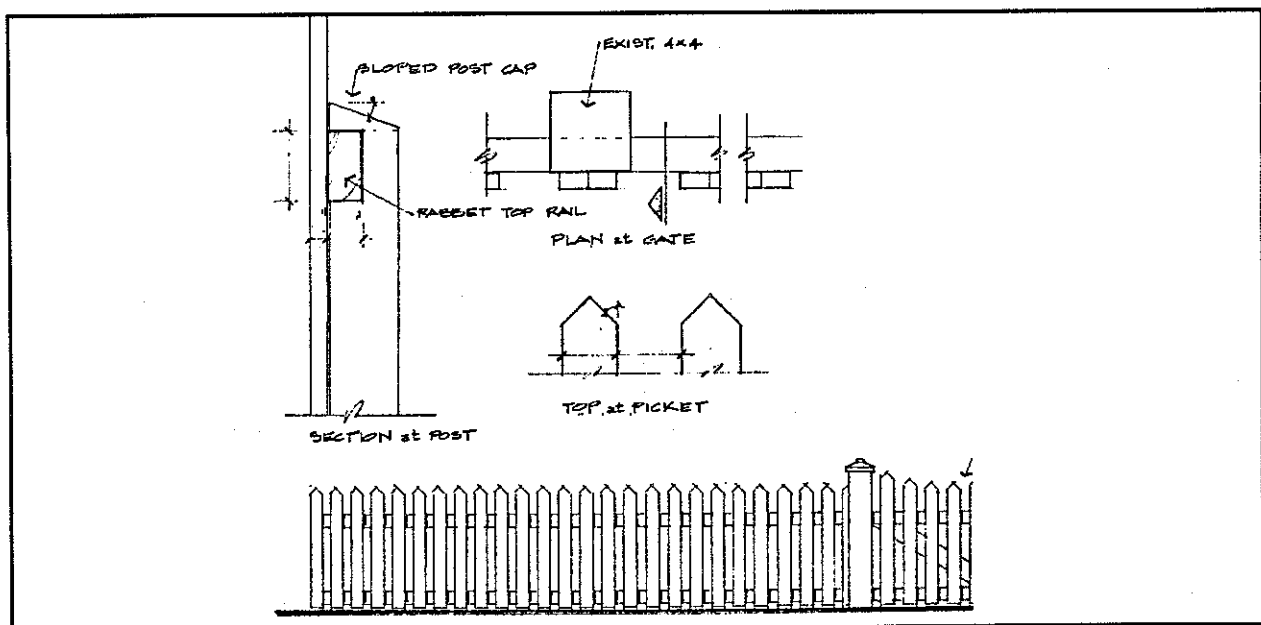
## **GUIDELINES**

- Fences, garden walls and gates should be appropriate in materials, design and scale to the period and character of the structure they surround.
- A number of different types of materials are appropriate for fences, garden walls and gates throughout the historic districts.
  - Masonry fences and walls of brick or stone are generally appropriate throughout the historic districts.
  - Wood is a traditional material for fences

and gates. Wood fences generally have vertical pickets.

- Ornamental iron or metal fences and gates are appropriate for late-19th and early 20th century Victorian structures.
- Modern mass-produced wood stockade fencing, unpainted redwood, rough cedar, and concrete block fences are not appropriate in the historic districts.
- Modern mass-produced wood diagonal lattice is also not appropriate in the historic districts. Wood lattice should have a rectangular pattern rather than a diamond pattern.
- Split rail type fences, horizontal board fences and other types of fences associated with the rural countryside are not appropriate in the historic districts.

- Fences, garden walls and gates made of synthetic materials such as fiberglass or concrete are not appropriate in the historic districts.
- Metal chain link fences are not appropriate in the historic districts except in certain institutional uses.



*Plan for a picket fence.*

SOURCE: 201 S. Fairfax Street, BAR Case #91-125

- Wood fences must be painted or stained.

## **APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS**

In order to properly evaluate the appropriateness of the design of a proposed fence, garden wall and/or gate, the Boards of Architectural Review require that an accurate depiction of the design be presented. Sketches that have no scale are not acceptable. Most designs for fences presented to the Boards of Architectural Review are prepared by a professional designer; however, such a professionally prepared submission is not mandatory.

**All applications for approval of fences, garden walls and gates must contain the following information:**

### **Alexandria Business License**

Proof of a valid Alexandria Business License is required at the time of application for contractors, subcontractors, architects and designers.

### **Photograph of Existing Building and Yard**

Clear photographs of the existing building

and yard/garden are required for reference.

### **Plot Plan**

A plot plan accurately showing the location of the proposed fence, garden wall and/or gate is required.

### **Size**

The drawing must accurately indicate the dimensions of the proposed fence, garden wall and/or gate.

### **Materials**

The materials to be used for the proposed fence, garden wall and/or gate must be specified.

### **Color**

The proposed color of the fence, garden wall and/or gate must be indicated and an actual color sample provided.

## **RELATED SECTIONS**

Exterior Lighting

Decks

Paint Colors

ADOPTED BY THE BOARDS OF  
ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW, 5/25/93



*Application for a new gate.*

SOURCE: 226 N. Fairfax Street, BAR Case #91-6, rust, orling & neale, architects

NOTE: Illustrations are provided for information only. Applications for certificates of appropriateness are reviewed and approved on a case-by-case basis.

#### ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Fences, garden walls and gates that require below grade footings, foundations or that create other types of ground disturbing activities may affect archaeological resources. With its rich history, the City of Alexandria is particularly concerned about its archaeological heritage. Archaeological resources in the historic districts are great in number and highly diverse in materials. They often consist of ceramic and glass fragments in the backyards of historic properties; however, archaeological resources are also brick-lined shafts in yards and basements; brick kilns; foundations, footings, postholes and builders trenches of non-extant buildings; landscape features such as walkways and gardens; and even American Indian artifacts which pre-date colonial Alexandria. Often these clues to the City's past appear to be unimportant debris, yet when the artifacts and building remains are excavated and recorded systematically, they provide the only knowledge of lost Alexandria.

Every application to the B.A.R. which potentially involves ground disturbance is reviewed by City archaeologists to determine whether significant archaeological resources may still survive on the property. Therefore, the potential for additional requirements to protect archaeological resources exists with any project that involves ground disturbing activities.

The applicant can speed along the archaeological review process by requesting a Preliminary Archaeological Assessment from Alexandria Archaeology at the

earliest date. Call (703) 838-4399, Tuesday through Saturday. Alexandria Archaeology is located on the third floor of the Torpedo Factory Art Center.

- RESIDENTIAL ZONES

In residential zones, the application for construction of fences, garden walls and gates that involve ground disturbing activities is reviewed by City archaeologists. In most cases, the applicant is required to notify Alexandria Archaeology before ground disturbance, so that a City archaeologist may monitor this work and record significant finds. However, when a property has a high potential for containing significant archaeological resources, a City archaeologist may request permission to excavate test samples in the affected area before the project begins.

- COMMERCIAL ZONES

In commercial zones and residential projects involving the construction of three or more houses, the ground disturbing activities associated with the construction of fences, garden walls and gates may necessitate compliance with the Alexandria Archaeological Protection Procedure (§ 11-411 of the Zoning Ordinance). The specific requirements may be obtained from the City Archaeologist. Occasionally, compliance in such projects may require the property owner to contract with an independent archaeologist to document conditions before and during construction. Property owners should contact the City Archaeologist as early as possible so that there are no project delays.